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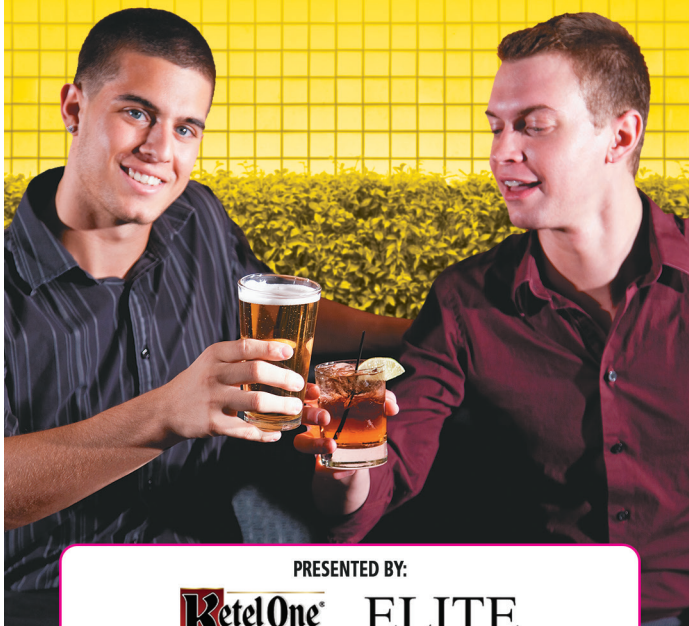
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ON THE COVER

The presentation of food and drink is an art. Our Fine Wine & Dine Issue takes a look at getting "Closer to Fine."
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The Dialectical of Fine

In this issue, we're talking about fine dining. We have a tremendous food and drink scene and I'm always proud to showcase it to the community. This can (and should) be an uncomfortable topic when there is great disparity in our world and community between what people are and are not able to afford. That said, I'm not one who throws out the baby with the bathwater. I don't think that things should be dismantled when not everyone can attain them; instead, conditions should be changed so people have the option to access them.

Assistance can be as broad as strengthening and maintaining anti-discrimination workplace laws. And campaigning for wage equity so that same-sex households in which both wage earners might be under the glass ceiling can earn more for their work. And working so that health care for broken bones or surgeries or hormone therapy doesn't lambast household budgets to pieces. There are no finer things to opt-in for when survival is on the line.

Other assistance comes by way of changing how things are accessed. Some of the "finer things" are free, like Mia, the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Some of the theaters have "pay what you can" nights or, as with the Mixed Blood Theatre, there is the Radical Hospitality program which provides no-cost access to all mainstage productions for any audience member. People can go to the Minnesota Children's Museum on a free Passport to Play from Saint Paul Public Libraries and Dakota County Libraries. When I was jobless, I splurged at nicer restaurants by ordering from the bar menu or going strictly during happy hour. Prix fixe menus are superb ways to taste more for less.

So, as we often do in our issues, this one isn't just about Fine Wine & Dine; we also talk about various programs that help with gaps in our

community, both food-related as well as elsewhere within the hierarchy of needs. Please be sure to look into the programs further. We talk about the GLBT Host Home Program of Avenues for Homeless Youth as part of the excerpt from Ryan Berg's book *No House to Call My Home*. In the Rainbow Resources, we give a hotline for the The Bridge for Youth, which provides services for homeless youth in Minnesota. In the "Closer to Fine" piece, I mention La Belle Vie's final meal being auctioned off in a fundraiser for Share Our Strength which fights childhood hunger.

Tonight I'll be going with one of our food writers, Joy Summers, to support one of our other food writers, Bradley Traynor, who is participating in myTalk 107.1's Project Down & Dirty - The Restaurant at The Freehouse in Minneapolis. Bradley and his on-air radio partner, Colleen Lindstrom, with their colleagues, will "design menus, serve food, host the evening, and work their butts off" for one night to raise money for hunger relief. Please be sure to check out the hunger relief organizations that are participating in Project Down & Dirty - The Restaurant: Second Harvest Heartland, a national food bank that sources and delivers meals to food shelves, pantries, and other agency partner programs; People Serving People, the largest family-focused homeless shelter in Minnesota; Open Arms, an organization that provides meals for people with life-threatening and chronic illness; and The Sheridan Story, a weekend food program which works to distribute sacks of food to food-insecure families to bridge the weekends between meals at school.

We can all be closer to fine, in so many ways. Let's work on it. Together.

With thanks,
Andy ■

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Connecting the Dots

One forgets, planning a trip, that one is hostage to weather, one's respiratory system, and the wanderlust of today's modern Old Masters.

For example. When last in Amsterdam, we sped to the Mauritshuis in Den Haag specifically to view Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, only to discover the Girl had flitted to New York, sporting her earring at the Frick.

Other times, however, things click into place, and one is privy to the magic of living history. This year, we returned, and she was there — a marvel to behold.

Then, suddenly before me was Rembrandt's *The Anatomical Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*, painted when the artist was only 25. (Tulp was born Claes Pieterzoon, but renamed himself after the bloom when "tulipmania" swept the Netherlands during the early 1600s.)

Immensely wealthy, Tulp's line merged with that of Jan Six I, a visit to whose home was a trip highlight and revelation. The combination of Tulp and Six wealth formed the nucleus of the Six Collection, located since 1915 on the Amstel riverbank.

It happened that Rembrandt was also a friend of Jan Six I, and painted the spectacular portrait that hangs in the home where Baron J. Six (XI) van Hillegom, lives today.

Admission to this treasure is free, but one must first request a visit, then receive an invitation from the Baron indicating the date and time to appear. Little was discarded over the centuries. As one marvels at a huge 1652 image of a rider and whip, the docent produces the very whip the subject is holding.

I sign the guest book, and learn it is the latest of 20 that have been touched by "friends, guests, and visitors since 1652," and will be added to the collection. With a frisson I was enveloped in the presence of the living Tulps and Sixes, ceaselessly energetic Rembrandt, not as images on a wall, but in the call of greetings at the door, the clink of glass and silver, and farewells in the night.

The intimation of these 300-year-old vibrant lives is worth the trip. Even being stricken with a cold and cough mid-trip had its upside: I lost 10 pounds in the bargain. Yes, I'll go back as soon as possible. ■

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Fine Wine & Dine

CLOSER TO FINE

by Andy Lien

6Smith

Recently, there has been quite the hubbub over the fine dining scene in Minneapolis, in particular. What has been thought of as the crown jewel, La Belle Vie, is closing. Vincent A Restaurant will be done at the end of the year. People are talking, wondering, making last pilgrimages to La Belle Vie as one would visit a friend who's not moving away, but moving on completely. You'll find me in Vincent's bar before every show at Orchestra Hall before the new year, ordering my usual: the Vincent Burger, poutine, and a mini-crème brûlée. This time last year, I was in this dining room for Restaurant Week, enjoying a more upscale entrée.

When I think of an evening out, rather than just eating out, I tend toward nicer places, with an emphasis on the middle. Much like the rest of my life's style. Not black-tie formal, not super-casual, but business dress. Not an extrovert, not an introvert, but an ambivert. Not so fancy to be out of my element, not too humble to be less-than-remarkable, but a comfortable, quality in-between. Such meals are my spin on fine dining, which is hardly on point. So, I have to wonder, what is fine dining? What's considered fine dining in our metropolitan area in particular? And, in a more useful

Photo by Hubert Bonnet

tone, what would be considered the finest wining and dining to be found in some of the menus around the towns? I asked and I received some great guidance from some knowledgeable voices of people with a great breadth and depth of experience. I hope you find it to be engaging and educational as well.

WHAT IS FINE DINING?

At this moment in time, under these circumstances in the restaurant scene in Minneapolis, I'm grateful to have consulted with the ever-gracious Chef Tim McKee, the man behind La Belle Vie and the development of other restaurants such as Libertine, Chino Latino, Manny's, Smalley's Caribbean BBQ & Pirate Bar, Barrio, Sea Change, and Masu Sushi & Robata. Being a James Beard Award Winner and the man whose restaurant just auctioned off its final meal for \$37,000 to benefit the Share Our Strength charity that works to end childhood hunger, he's a good one to ask about what fine dining means. No, there will not be one set definition of the term, but his definition is a good place to start.

"One thing is that we talk a lot about fine dining and what it means; fine dining to a lot of people is misunderstood," McKee explains. "A lot of people's definitions would fall into the fancy dining categories. For me, I have a pretty specific understanding of what fine dining is and this is through years of experi-

Blurred Lines

Will Selin, corporate executive chef at Masu Sushi & Robata

When I think of fine dining in the Twin Cities today, I think of Piccolo, Tilia, and Restaurant Alma, among others. Of course, they don't have the same focus as La Belle Vie with linens and service, etcetera. You don't have that experience of being awed and intimidated when walking into the dining room. There were more restaurants like that in the '50s and '60s. Today fine dining is more approachable. The lines are more blurred between fine and casual dining. Today fine dining is defined more by the chef's finesse, and farm-to-table conscientious consumption. It's about chefs that spend the time to do their research, take the time to perfect their craft. They make a point to stay current with food trends and ingredients. In this town, we expect the guy whose name is on the door to be the person who is actually cooking the food.

encing it throughout the country in different ways."

And here's where we split the hair, leaving us with food, service, and style that all create the total fine dining package. "When you're talking about the upper end of

dining, it's not just the food. Having exceptional food is part of what makes the experience, but you can have exceptional food without it being fine dining."

McKee clarifies, "It has to have an elevated style of service. The appointments of the dining room have to be finer. A lot of what we call fine dining is casual dining, done exceptionally well."

Randy Stanley, owner of 6Smith on the waterfront in Wayzata, agrees with the assessment that fine dining is defined by a high level of quality, and the execution of the three elements that make a restaurant a restaurant: food, service, and atmosphere. "For a fine dining establishment to be considered fine dining, the foods should be creative and on point with the concept, raw products should be the finest, and likely, most expensive available, both perfectly and consistently executed. The service should be flawless and seamlessly delivered by experienced, well-trained employees committed to the industry. The atmosphere should be upscale, refined, and luxurious."

Many of us draw on memories from our childhoods when we set our expectations for fine dining. In the case of Olivier Vrambout, owner and chef of L'Etoile du Nord in Bayport, his childhood was in Belgium, and his family ate at many "old castles and Michelin-star restaurants where the waiters would wear white gloves and hold your chairs as you got up to leave. The decors of the inside were stark, and almost museum-like." Though that was 25 years ago for Vrambout and dining is more casual now, he acknowledges that "there are still some places where you would need to dress the part to feel comfortable in the environment. And, I think dressing up is a part of showing respect to the chef or owner — who dedicate themselves to the harsh working hours of the business."

Much of what fine dining involves is what we as diners come to expect. What do we want to experi-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 ➔

Photo by John Reed Forsman

The
Bachelor
Farmer



Fine Wine & Dine



Sea
Change

ence, above and beyond a tremendous meal? "Fine dining diners expect an ambience with soft lighting, linen-covered tables, fresh flowers, candles, and beautiful china and glassware," says Michelle Jensen, general manager of Café & Bar Lurcat next to Loring Park in Minneapolis. "Fine dining service requires an exceptionally educated staff. On the floor, they are confident and showcase points of service that you won't see in our neighboring restaurants. Synchronized service, swarm clearing, giving the guest the right of way — we acknowledge

and welcome every guest that walks past us, fold their napkins when they leave the table and before they return, and carry beverages from the bar to their table for dinner, as just a few examples," Jensen offers. "Our seasoned staff takes great pride in their craft."

Josh Duffy, general manager of Campiello in Eden Prairie, echoes the sentiment that fine dining has changed over the last 10 years. "The atmosphere of the fine dining restaurant has been relaxed a little; however, one of the things that separates fine dining restaurants and other restaurants would be the attention to detail. For example," Duffy explains, "we may not have dress codes any more, but we make sure our servers are serving and clearing with the correct hand from the correct side of the guest. We also refold the napkin if a guest excuses themselves from the table so the table looks perfect at all times. These are the types of little things that guests with a lot of fine dining experience notice and appreciate."

CLOSER TO FINE

So what is the future of fine dining? "The closing of La Belle vie speaks volumes," says McKee. "People, at least in this region, aren't as interested and don't value fine dining as much as they once did. That's been on a decline in this market and it has been for quite some time. We saw the 510 come and go, Goodfellows come and go, D'Amico Cucina come and go. Evidence of the decline. But we also saw the proliferation of the casual restaurants that don't have the formality or pomp and circumstance of fine dining. They're not as

imposing as fine dining should be. You have to have a lot of experience to be truly comfortable in the fine dining restaurants and there's a cost that comes with it. Nationally, the trend is prevalent. There's not nearly as much focus on fine dining nationally as there is the exciting new, accessible restaurants. You could go to these restaurants every day."

And many of us do. When I think of how simply wearing what I donned in the morning for a day of work and pulling out my smartphone to make a reservation on an app can mean I'm going to have a high-quality meal at a mid-range price this evening, it's just that easy. I had to do nothing to prepare myself for a fine meal by people who know their craft and their audience. Like spinning a globe and seeing where my finger lands, it has to do with being open to a bit of adventure, within the limits of what's available. And we have a nice, full set of options here.

"Fine dining revolves around the overall experience — a culinary adventure," says Ryan Cook, chef de cuisine at Sea Change. And in that vein, we have fine dining in spades.

Photo by Hubert Bonnet



Morphing Through Time Caroline Glawe, general manager of Wise Acre Eatery

I think fine dining, dining out in general, morphs over time. In the '70s and '80s, the trend was nouvelle cuisine with an emphasis on plating and presentation of food prepared in a lighter, healthier style. By the time the '90s hit, the nouvelle cuisine movement finally hit Minneapolis and you saw restaurants like Lucia's excelling at food simply prepared and exquisitely plated. Molecular gastronomy was on the heels of nouvelle cuisine, bringing its science, and pushing the boundaries of what we understood food to be. Currently, the conversation involves local farms and farmers, who are often highlighted on the menu itself.

At one time, fine dining demanded white linen tablecloths and napkins, book-size wine lists, and formally dressed back waiters at the ready to crumb tables. I think we as an American people have found great comfort in casual. We no longer dress up to board an airplane, bedroom slippers are accepted foot attire for grocery shopping, and the dress code for dining out is comfy casual. Friendly, knowledgeable service trumps snooty pretension. Fine dining rings of special occasion.

These days, we (thankfully) see more women leading the kitchen, proving that leading a kitchen is not a gender-specific vocation. Sadly, we also see chefs following the casual theme song. Yoga pants and holey jeans replace professional chef attire, leaving one wondering when we will see nurses and firefighters working in their play clothes.




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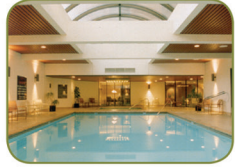










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Eric Dayton, owner of world-renowned restaurant The Bachelor Farmer, is familiar with the evolution of dining in Minneapolis. As said by Dayton, "I think fine dining today emphasizes the quality of food and service, just as it always has, but without the formality that defined it in the past. The Minneapolis restaurant scene has come a long way over the past 10 or so years and will only get stronger, but I think you'll find that white tablecloths are going to become increasingly rare."

As an innovator in the food and drink scene with The Marvel Bar holding its own beneath the blue-and-white-gingham tableclothed restaurant, Dayton is now developing a more casual eating space that will house a niche both literally and figuratively in their set of buildings in the North Loop. Having moved their flagship Askov-Finlayson store and offices to the building next to The Bachelor Farmer, there will now be space between the buildings for a food and drink garden. It will be a one-stop destination for formal and casual fare, with the option of checking out some Warby Parkers to boot.

As Vrambout observes, "Today I think people want to enjoy a great, creative meal in more of a come-as-you-are manner. Decor now is livelier, more open, more inviting. Menus are more balanced between a combination of fusion and cultural ingredients. Ingredients are more



Photo by Mike Hnida

about their source. The ingredients tell the story, a know-your-farmer, know-your-food kind of thing."

A less starched-collar environment lends itself to authenticity of experience. By being relaxed, the diners can take in what's coming to them. Jensen tells us that the folks at Café & Bar Lurcat consider it to be a "very approachable fine dining experience versus the uptight feeling that some guests feel when dining in a place that doesn't feel comfortable and welcoming because of the stuffiness stigma." One that they hone to be as versatile and welcoming to many different people.

Wise Acre Eatery has perfected

the art of knowing itself, its place, and its people. On Nicollet Avenue in South Minneapolis, it's a restaurant owned by a farm, led by a chef with Southern roots, and "falls smack dab in the middle of formal and casual dining," says general manager Caroline Glawe. "The building is an old gas station filled with chunky wooden tables built from salvaged wood. The floors are concrete, the walls baked enamel. Staff wear clothes reflective of their personal style. They do not crumb tables. They do, however, offer freshly cracked pepper, are knowledgeable about the wine list, can speak of the farm where most of our food is grown, and sincerely care about the customer experience."

I can attest to this personally as I've shared many a meal there with friends, eating out of jars and admiring just how attentive a staff can be without an ounce of pretension.

Many of the experts I talked to mentioned the shift in not only where and what we prefer to eat, but how we prefer to dine. The meal becoming more of a group activity is being seen more and more at the high-quality restaurants. As Chef Tim McKee says, "How do I like to eat personally? La Belle Vie was one expression of that. At Chino Latino, I like to try a lot of little things. I like to have a lot of

Photo by Mike Hnida

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different tastes. A communal dining experience — look at what we did at Solera. I don't need a 21-ounce steak. Instead, my preference would be to take six people to go to Libertine and pass plates. It's like the question: what do you have in your refrigerator? I always get asked that, and I always give a different answer."

Randy Stanley of 6Smith concurs: "The coolest trend that I love in dining out right now is seeing a group of people order a bunch of appetizers, share a couple of entrées, a few cocktails in the middle of the table and then finish it off with three to four desserts. It creates an instant party and a bond with all of the people you are dining and sharing the experience with. Maybe that is the new standard for family dinner?"

And Michelle Jensen at Café & Bar Lurcat chimes in that such a group dining experience is "a trend that our staff enjoys because it gives us an opportunity to encourage guests to try new things. We all agree that this style of service and ordering is what we restaurant enthusiasts enjoy when we get to dine out."

THE DINING

As someone who's not a food professional, I want to ask the experts what to eat. I prefer to skip places where I order at a countertop and get a number for my table, unless it's a casual, low-context meal. What I want is to learn from the server, glean from them what's to be known about the menu. I'm the one saying, "Okay, between these two completely different entrées, which one would you pick?" And I'm always happy. Order what I order and we'll both be gloating about it later. So, I asked the professionals about their menus and they answered.

Eric Dayton, The Bachelor Farmer

We don't do set tasting menus at The Bachelor Farmer, but I often create my own by starting with an appetizer, then having a toast course, and then an entrée. Or you

can just come in and have a single dish and a beer, and I think people appreciate that flexibility. In terms of specific dishes, our menu changes so frequently with the seasonal availability of ingredients that if I recommend something now, by the time this story goes to print, it'll probably be gone and our chefs will be on to something new.

Michelle Jensen, Café & Bar Lurcat

Chef Adam King and his talented team rolled out the new fall menu on October 15, which has a number of highlights. Starters: duck and foie gras wonton soup; braised Nueske's bacon with hoisin brandy and compressed Asian pear; apple, cheese, and chive salad (of course). Entrée: adobo-marinated Berkshire pork tenderloin with apple, hazelnut and cheddar bread pudding; rabbit with Riesling and roasted winter vegetables over house-made egg noodles; Chilean sea bass marinated in miso. Vegetables: caramelized Brussels sprouts; roasted cauliflower. Desserts: dark chocolate profiteroles with salted caramel ice cream and spiced pecans; hard cider caramel cheesecake with apple walnut crumble.

Josh Duffy, Campiello

A well-rounded fine dining-style meal at Campiello would come in three to four courses. First, it would include an order of calamari and/or bruschetta to share for the table. I would then recommend our house salad that has been a staple at Campiello for years, though you really can't go wrong with any of the salad options. I would then recommend the balsamic-glazed short ribs with spaghetti or the pork porterhouse chop with fruit mostarda for the entrée course, with at least one side item to share (I recommend the Brussels sprouts). To finish, I feel like the best dessert on our list is the butterscotch budino.

Ryan Cook, Sea Change

At Sea Change you'll find seafood that you won't find anywhere else. I'd recommend starting with oysters

from the raw bar and move on to the abalone. I'd pair it with something sparkling.

Caroline Glawe, Wise Acre Eatery

Every dish on our menu is well thought out by Chef Beth Fisher. Each element made from scratch in a kitchen void of corn syrup (nothing from Sysco!) and filled with the highest quality ingredients. Whether you come in for a bowl of chili at noon or a multi-course dinner on a Saturday night, you'll get a meal made by cooks who care that they are using ingredients from our farm, a farm farmed beyond organic, which is pretty fine.

Olivier Vrambout, L'Etoile du Nord

At L'Etoile du Nord our menu can change two to three times a week based on what ingredients are coming into season at the local farms. Currently on our menu, I would consider the rabbit terrine with dried cherries and stoemp potato croquette a great fall dish to be enjoying right now.

Will Selin, Masu Sushi & Robata

Sit at the sushi bar and order the omaka se from Chef Asan Yamamoto. Omaka se is our chef's choice sushi assortment, and Asan is easily one of the best, if not the best, sushi chef in town. You can see your meal being prepared, and you get a real appreciation for the thought, creativity, and passion that go into your food. It's both great food and great entertainment.

Randy Stanley, 6Smith

Most of the dishes at 6Smith have a degree of difficulty in execution which raises them above the norm. Most guests can't tell you why something is better than down the street, but it is noticeably better. You can pretty much order anything and both see and taste the difference.

THE DRINKING

The drink scene has its darlings and, while it's been focused on craft

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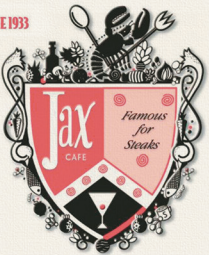


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beer and microbreweries in the past and is recently doting on new local distilleries and cocktail rooms, wine has been a constant. Perhaps people are returning to the multiple layers of alcohol that seemed to accompany the fine dining of yore, dipping into a number of the categories of drink.

My grandfather was big on taking us to the golf club and moved from afternoon beer on the golf course to pre-dinner martinis, to dinner martinis, to an after-dinner grasshopper, to end with a brandy and bénédictine to round out the evening... and I loved catching a taste of every float of that drink parade. It was ritual and rite all rolled into one that seemed to occur whether we were at the golf club in Litchfield, Eddie Webster's in Bloomington, Manhattan Beach by Crosslake, The Safari South in Spicer, or even the Mai Thai in Excelsior (okay, the Mai Thai also usually included a flaming volcano drink with long straws). If more had been available to him, he would have likely still stayed the course on the usuals. But, today, the entrepreneurial spirit of invention and imagination that has been applied to beer, wine, and spirits means that our tastes can be staid or trend toward flights of fancy as we please. So what pleases the professionals?

Tim McKee

It depends on my mood. It depends on what kind of experience I want to portray. It's pretty complicated. I can't tell you what kind of wine is my favorite wine. Sometimes I'm really interested in Provençal wines. Or cabernet sauvignon. Or Spanish wines. It's really as much my mood as what would be the perfect pairing. The cocktails? That would be different as well. If I'm interested in pairing, I'd rather pair my food with wines. Sometimes I just want something refreshing to pair with what I'm eating. And sometimes I just want a cocktail. We have an explosion of amazing bartenders doing amazing things and I want to take that in. While I love a lot of them,

it's rare for me to say that "this is my drink and I'm going to have it every time I come in here." And there's always Grain Belt.

Eric Dayton, The Bachelor Farmer

I've really been enjoying chardonnay from the Jura region of France recently; it has a flavor that almost resembles sherry. As the temperature outside cools, I start to prefer richer white wines along with red wine. And then down in Marvel Bar, this is old-fashioned weather in my book.

Michelle Jensen, Café & Bar Lureat

We have rolled out the new cocktail and wine list as well. We are so excited to feature so many wines that you can't find just anywhere. Our bar managers are so proud of the new additions. Featured white glass pour: falanghina, Alois, Caulino, Italy 2014. Featured red glass pour: blaufränkisch, Hopler, Austria 2010. We are also excited to offer the super Tuscan, 'promis', Tuscany, Italy 2011 by the glass as well as new cocktails.

Josh Duffy, Campiello

Martinis, Manhattans, and bourbon; white wine should be an arneis, while recommended reds are barbaresco, brunello, and super Tuscan.

Ryan Cook, Sea Change

At Sea Change we make barrel-aged cocktails; we currently have an orange Manhattan that I think is pretty cool.

Caroline Glawe, Wise Acre Eatery

My current wine feature is The 7% Solution, a group of renegade California winemakers making wine from grape varieties outside of the same eight grapes that 93 percent of California vineyards are

Too Much to Say About Wine Olivier Vrambout, owner and chef of L'Etoile du Nord

There is too much to say about wine in general, and it's a matter of preference. I prefer to drink — and serve — wines that are biodynamic, organic, and sustainable or made in small batches, and tell a story.

Some old grapes are starting to come back. I am a big fan of Burgundy and pinot as well as others, such as chenin blanc. I think wines from New Zealand, South Africa, and Croatia are slowly carving a small market on the wine shelves.

If I had to say, my favorite red wine right now would be Ken Wright Cellars pinot noir out of Oregon. It's a beautiful, well-balanced wine. It's an ideal fall wine, perfect for the cooler evening temperatures, and it doesn't overpower just about any dish. A great, really fun white wine that I just discovered is from Fausse Piste winery. It's a blend of chardonnay, pinot blanc, and sauvignon blanc out of southern Oregon. Fun, fun, white wine. Another is Chateau d'Orignac Pineau des Charentes. It's a French apéritif made from a blend of cognac and red grapes aged in oak. It goes especially well with chocolate, pâté, duck, and cheeses. I would have to say that would be my absolute favorite.

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All are either organic or biodynamic. Skin-fermented whites (orange wines). A fabulous Petulant Natural. And we have great wine cocktails. I love my list right now.

Will Selin, Masu Sushi & Robata

At Masu we offer a sake tasting flight and recently introduced a whiskey flight that gives you the choice of three different imported, artisanal Japanese whiskeys served neat with a glass of ice. They're two great, entertaining ways to introduce yourself to, or learn more about, these categories. I'm personally a huge bourbon and whiskey fan. I have a private collection of several hundred bourbons at home that I've collected over the years. My dad and I have established a father-and-son tradition of going to Kentucky two to three times a year to sample the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 ➔

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new whiskeys and bourbons. In addition, later in October, I'm part of a team from Masu that is going to Japan, and we'll be studying food trends and touring several Japanese whiskey and sake breweries. Specific domestic brands I'd recommend are Heaven Hill, Elijah Craig, Thomas H. Handy, and Evan Williams, which is a nice, approachable option.

Randy Stanley, 6Smith

I am particularly fond of the wines from small producers and families around the world. They are a particular value in most cases, and you can't beat that handmade quality only found in small production wineries. My favorite wine is any wine in my hand right now.

What can we conclude about fine dining? It's changing. It may still exist in some semblance of what we remember from the past, some etiquette and pomp and circumstance may remain. And it's changing. Diners are more engaged and restaurants are more transparent in their operations and sourcing. Fine dining might now be fancy dining which might actually be high-quality dining which might truly be the restaurant on the corner whose chef we run into at the grocery store. Get out there and stay educated and engaged. Explore and learn. Wine and dine. ■

RESOURCES:

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www.6smith.com

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Brian Boitano

From Olympic Champion to the Food Network



Brian Boitano. Photo by Paul Harvath



Photo by Jay Adeff



Photo by Jay Adeff

Brian Boitano first made his mark on the international scene when he won the bronze medal at the 1978 World Junior Figure Skating Championships, beating future rival Brian Orser for that medal. In 1982, Boitano became the first American to land a triple axel. In 1987 he introduced his signature jump, the 'Tano triple lutz' in which the skater raises his left arm above his head. In fact, Boitano was known primarily as a jumper early in his career and he, along with several other skaters, helped push the technical envelope of men's skating.

It was this dedication to artistry and desire to push the envelope that garnered Boitano significant achievements in the world of figure skating. He is the 1988 Olympic champion, the 1986 and 1988 World Champion, and the 1985–1988 U.S. National Champion. Ahead of the 2016 U.S. Figure Skating Championships, *Lavender* caught up with Boitano.

Having been a while since you competed, what keeps drawing you back to the world of figure skating?

Brian Boitano: I never left the world of figure skating. I still do tours and television specials, and I train on the ice daily to prepare for them.

You came out following the announcement of your being named to the United States delegation to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. You said you wanted to wait until after the announcement. Why was that timing so important for you?

BB: I had actually never planned to come out. It was only after the delegation was announced and the fact that President Obama was sending a message of tolerance and diversity to Russia through the delegation that I decided to be vocal about my personal life. It was my intention to support the President, the message, and the country.

You've also done many cameos in films and television as yourself. Many skaters don't have the lasting fame that you've experienced. How does this notoriety so far after your competitive days feel?

BB: I am grateful for all the work opportunities my career has given me. It feels like I am very fortunate.

Many people might know you from your time on the Food Network. How did your show come about? Is cooking something


you've always enjoyed doing?

BB: Originally I approached the producer of my show with a concept combining skating and food. When he found out how much I was into cooking and that I entertain on a regular basis, he decided to produce a show with me just cooking for my friends, a slice of my real life.

And you've launched a cookbook, too. What inspires your style of cooking and the recipes that readers can find in your book?


BB: My recipes are inspired by the active lifestyle that so many people lead these days. The recipes are easy to make with few steps and healthy and fresh ingredients. They are for anyone who leads a busy life and still wants to eat really well. Plus the recipes are great for entertaining, because it appears as though you have spent a lot of time preparing them when actually they are very simple to make. ■

*Be sure to pick up a copy of Brian Boitano's book, *What Would Brian Boitano Make?: Fresh And Fun Recipes For Sharing With Family And Friends*, and see him at the 2016 U.S. Figure Skating Championships in St. Paul. For more information, visit www.2016uschampionships.com.*



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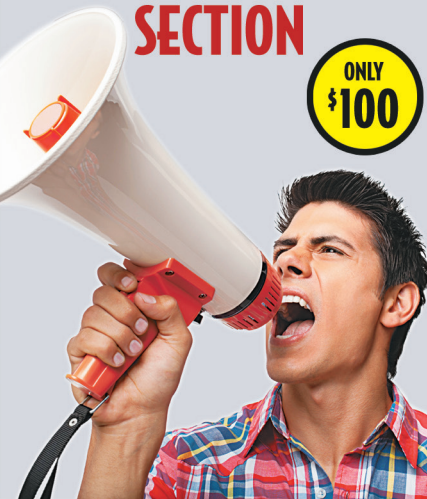
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Doubt: A Parable. Photo by Heidi Bohnenkamp

DOUBT: A PARABLE

Nov. 7-21

Lab Theater, 700 N. 1st St., Minneapolis

612-333-7977

www.thelabtheater.org

Odds are that New Epic's staging of John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt* will be well worth the trip to the Lab in the Warehouse

District. Director Joseph Stodola respects language, which ironically, the film which the play's actual playwright directed, did not. It became overly cinematic, distracting from its core concerns. What makes *Doubt* a dramatic masterpiece is

its economy of language through which startling ideas spring from. It won both the Pulitzer and the Tony in 2005.

Stodola points out, "In Shanley's play, like in life, the suspicion — or, even worse, the *accusation* — of pedophilia carries the threat of personal and professional ruin. Furthermore, with such an accusation, no proof is needed for the court of public opinion to convict. Father Flynn, even if he's innocent, knows that a public declaration of the Sister's suspicions will mar his priesthood at St. Nicholas, and it will follow him the rest of his life, wherever he goes." Adam Qualls plays Father Flynn. Claudia Wilkens is Sister Aloysius.

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In the 1970s Peter Shaffer's minimalist drama, *Equus*, rocked the western world. The harrowing tale of a 17-year-old named Alan Strang, his love for horses — one in particular — and his mother's Judeo-Christian extremism looms in the annals of British drama. Alan's crisis also creates a crisis for his psychiatrist, Martin Dysart. It's the sort of raw theatrical choice one would expect from Theatre Coup d'Etat.

Director James Napoleon Stone feels that "Shaffer is trying to show that Alan Strang (Kevin Fanshaw) is not disturbed at all, but subject to an intense passion that he has cultivated since he was a boy. Dysart (Charles Numrich) recognizes this, and instead of judging the boy, he sees the honest worship within him. For the rest of the play we see him struggle with what will 'help' the boy — in taking away the pain, does he restore the patient or take away the passion?"

THE EVENTS

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The Realish Housewives of Edina. Photo by Bridget Bennett

Touring Company of *The Events* by David Greig with music by John Browne. The play's creation was motivated by the mass shootings of children in Norway earlier in the decade by Anders Behring Breivick, a man pathologically obsessed with what he thought were the evils of Islam, feminism, Marxism, and multiculturalism. However, these ideas are not discussed with the depth that one would expect.

The Events casts a white woman (Lesley Hart) as an outraged vicar and a black man (Clifford Samuel) as The Boy. The play attempts to explain the unexplainable as it gropes toward finding a way to forgive heinous wrongdoing. Playwright David Greig and director Ramin Gray are clearly heartfelt in their yearning. However, the play seems to get locked into a kind of circular venting of legitimate outrage. It needs a more structured narrative and a more clearly defined context. The best part is that various choirs are accompanying performances. The night I attended the Twin Cities Women's Choir gave a soulful rendering of John Browne's music.

THE REALISH HOUSEWIVES OF EDINA

Through Nov. 15

New Century Theatre

615 Hennepin Ave., City Center, Minneapolis

612-455-9501

www.HennepinTheatreTrust.org

Chatty Kathy reality television is mischievously spoofed in *The Realish Housewives of Edina*. There's the host who is clearly codified as gay and then there are the women whose concerns about their social lives which, to them, are more serious than climate change or homelessness. Five fine actresses give charming performances that are deliberately over the top. Anna Hickey is the perfect mix of blue collar can-do and smart fashion sense that puts off the snottier women. Kim Kivens glistens as a Slavic sex bomb who awkwardly tries to portray a social consciousness. Katherine Kupiecki is hilarious as an Edina political operative, and you can easily imagine how her political ideology leans. Quinn Shadko is the perfectly pompous socialite. And where would we be without the proverbial ditz? Karissa Lade fills those heels delightfully as Desiree.

Kate James and Tim Sniffen's script follows the conceits of a mainstream talk show wonderfully. Theresa Akers's set captures the look elegantly. Elegant is also the word for Suzanna Schneider's costumes. And the whole ritual is overseen by Adan Varela, the host of the show. Crisply directed by Matt Miller with a clear eye for the smugness of white women of privilege.



A Thousand Clowns. Photo by Richard Fleischman

A THOUSAND CLOWNS

Through Nov. 8

Theatre in the Round

245 Cedar Ave., Minneapolis

612-333-3010

www.theatreintheround.org

Herb Gardner's 1962 hit has become a classic and it strikes a nerve today because of unemployment issues and changing definitions of family. At Theatre in the Round, director Dona Werner Freeman shares, "*A Thousand Clowns* celebrates an unconventional household. Murray Burns (Mark L. Mattison) is the proxy caretaker of his 12-year-old nephew, Nick (Parker Miller). They thrive

in Murray's bohemian and eclectic 1962 New York City one-room apartment. But the Bureau of Child Welfare steps in to question the viability of their unique set up."

She continues, "I've enjoyed looking at this little domestic unit from our 2015 vantage point, when so many wonderful family configurations are being embraced. In many ways, social change in the United States can seem to come at an infuriatingly slow crawl; but lately the way we respect and embrace a myriad of family compositions has zoomed forward, and that is certainly worthy of our applause." ■

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Children & Family

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS NO HOUSE TO CALL MY OWN

Ryan Berg

Although GLBT people are more accepted and less stigmatized as a whole, more than a million youth in the United States are homeless; almost 40 percent of them are GLBT, and a disproportionately high number of those youth are youth of color. In an excerpt from his new book, *No House to Call My Home*, youth worker Ryan Berg highlights the struggles for one youth rejected by her family for being gay. Berg currently manages the Minneapolis and Suburban Host Home Programs of Avenues for Homeless Youth where volunteers open their homes and share resources with young people experiencing homelessness.

I'm surprised when Barbara walks into my office, sits down, and acts like nothing's new. She's been AWOL from the group home for a month now. I think she's living with her girlfriend's family but there's no way to be sure. Things were going well until her father and stepmother showed up at court for her permanency planning hearing, where the judge must determine the appropriateness of the agency's long-term plan for the youth and the reasonableness of the agency's efforts to execute the plan. Before entering the courtroom they cornered Barbara, berated her, and disowned her for acting like a boy. If she put on a dress, he'd consider supporting her, her father said, but as she is, she is an abomination. I tried to separate them, to shield Barbara from his words, but by the time we were ushered in to see the judge, she was trembling.

I was there to tell the court that Barbara had improved since coming to the program. She was placed with the agency after her stepmother filed a Person in

Need of Supervision (PINS) petition — a request for the court to intervene when a child becomes out of control. Barbara's stepmother said that she was wild and disrespectful. She'd leave the house for days at a time, was truant from school. The stepmother alleged physical threats and drug abuse. Barbara claims her stepmother just wanted her out of their lives. She says her father was given an ultimatum and chose his wife.

When Barbara came into our care in mid-2004, she began attending school regularly for the first time in nearly two years. Her teachers said she was smart and that she participated in class. She hadn't run away from the group home or stayed out past curfew like she did while living with her father. She never tried to hide her marijuana use, and the agency was working with her on issues of chemical dependency.

On the day of the planning hearing, her father got her so worked up outside the courtroom that when the judge addressed her, she snapped at him.

"See how she acts, Your

Honor?" her father said.

Crying, she cursed at him, and had to be escorted out.

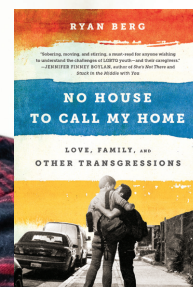
When we left court that day, her placement with the agency was extended for another six months. Barbara was silent on the train ride home and studied the advertisements for facial citrus peels in order to avoid conversation. Her face didn't betray any emotion. I told her to forget what her father had said. She was making strides and needed to continue in that direction. The subway car rattled and shook, the lights flickered as we screeched to a halt at her station. "Stay strong," I said. "I'm here for you." She smiled dimly and promised she'd continue to try hard, then turned to exit the subway car.

She went AWOL that night from Keap Street and stopped attending school. She calls occasionally to tell me she's OK but never discloses her location. I hadn't seen her since that day in court, nearly a month ago.

Barbara absently punches the keyboard of my computer with one finger. Pinned up on the wall behind her, along with

a list of caseworker telephone extensions and GED test locations, is the large photograph of Barbara standing with her father and brother at the zoo. In the picture there's a youthful innocence about her. That joy, that free expression on her face, is missing from the person I know.

Barbara pulls her camouflage Yankees cap down on her face. She looks frail, like she's stopped eating. The sports jersey she's wearing hangs from her slight frame; she swims in her jeans. Her dark skin is ashen and her eyes look heavy and somber. I don't know how long I'll have her here so I pull out my wallet, drop a twenty into her hand, and tell her to use it for food. She thanks me, smiles, then her eyes fall to her sneakers. When I ask how she's doing she becomes motionless, seems to be holding her breath. She has a sweet disposition. Normally she's good-natured but out of nowhere she can erupt, lashing out for the tiniest transgression. That's a side of her we didn't see much. Typically, when still at the group home, she would be found watching B.E.T.



with the other residents, her bright smile exposing a line of perfect, white teeth.

When Barbara arrived at Keap Street the staff loved her right away. Gladyce gushed about her acclimating to the home. "She made her bed in the morning and left for school right on time. This child does her chores and don't need to be told twice about curfew. How on earth did we get this one?" Gladyce said, and then let out a sharp laugh. The honeymoon period ended when Barbara flew into a rage at Dia, another resident, whom she accused of stealing her Nike Air Jordans. Gladyce said it was impossible to de-escalate Barbara's behavior, that it took three counselors to defuse the situation. When Gladyce tried to intervene Barbara bristled and told her to go back to her box of cookies in the office and mind her business. She persisted and Barbara grabbed a candy bar off of the counter, dangled it in front of Gladyce like bait, calling her a hippo. She was unfazed by Barbara's outburst; most of the residents were prone to lashing out. Later Barbara went to Gladyce in her office and apologized, said she didn't know what happened, didn't know why she was so angry.

Barbara is "A.G.," or an "aggressive," a label used in the gay urban community for butch lesbians. She binds her breasts, dresses in baggy jeans and sports jerseys; her hair is set in tight cornrows; occasionally a gold-plated grill covers her front teeth. On the street she's always mistaken for a boy. She has a tough, callous veneer when on the street. She hides her hurt, or at least she used to.

"I can't do it no more, yo," she says with an exhale, and begins to tremble. She makes her hands into fists then opens them, the twenty dropping to her feet. "I can't do it." Her eyes roll toward the ceiling and her body tenses. She flinches so fully that I think for a moment she's having a seizure. Then tears begin to fall. "I got nobody," she says. I wish my office had a door to shut to give us some privacy.

"Come back to the house," I say and roll my chair closer to her, leaning in. "We can make it work." Her face becomes taut until she releases into sobs; her shoulders heave. She no longer hears me. She's alone, deep inside someplace within herself.

"Why you leave me?"
"Leave?" I say. "Barbara, I never—"

She lets out a wail that shakes me.

"Grandma," she calls out. Her head bows. She wipes her wet nose with the ball of her hand. "She the only one who really loved me." I place my hand on her shoulder and feel how her body trembles. I search for some tissue to give her but only find a balled-up Kleenex with chewed gum buried in the center. I don't have any words that seem appropriate. I know there's nothing I can do to protect her; I'm helpless to provide even a glimmer of hope.

"Come back" is all I can say. We both know it's not enough.

I pick the twenty off the floor and push it back into Barbara's hand. Her cheeks are wet, her breathing stutters. I try to strategize the way a caseworker should: Barbara's safety is paramount and she needs immediate housing, but she refuses to return to the group home, saying it's too chaotic, that she can't put up with the other residents' lying and stealing. I could initiate an emergency respite placement at a different group home outside the LGBTQ program, but I know Barbara won't go. She is stubborn, willing to consider only one option. She wants to be transferred to our apartment program, where residents pair up with one roommate. I've told her time and time again that the program is designed for youth who have shown potential for living independently. The rules are clear. All residents considered for the apartment program have to be functioning well in the group home, do their chores regularly, and follow regulations. They must demonstrate good relationships with other residents, attend school on a regular basis, and have a part-

time job. Barbara currently fails to meet any of the criteria.

I plead with her again to return to Keap Street. I'll call her school and see if they'll take her back. Between classes and a part-time job she'll rarely have to see the other residents, limiting the chance of any conflict that might arise. She could be eligible for the apartment program within a few months.

"No way I'm going back there," Barbara says.

When I ask if she can stay with her brother she shakes her head. He just turned 18 and can't take on the responsibility of his younger sister. I don't even suggest her father as an option. After the court date he was impossible to talk with. He continued the name-calling, the blaming. When I tried to follow up after our meeting, I was met with icy derision. Barbara was my problem, I was told. They were done with her.

Even the youth who function well in foster care are likely to falter once they're out on their own. One study suggests nearly half of homeless youth have gone through the foster care system at one time or another and 40 percent of homeless youth identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. After aging out of the system, over half of the youth remain unemployed. Debilitating depression, anxiety, and addiction affects one-third of this population. Unless there's a visiting resource, an adult who can function as a role model, and a stable, caring presence in their lives, there's little hope of a life off the streets or outside the system.

"What about Rochelle?" I ask. Barbara has been living with her girlfriend's family off and on since leaving Keap Street. Rochelle is two years older than Barbara and seven months pregnant.

The family's house is on the verge of collapse. Rochelle's mother has ten children, all of whom still live with her. She collects Social Security checks and some of her older children are selling drugs. Other than that, there isn't any income

for the family. When Barbara's there, she's just another mouth to feed, which causes tension between Rochelle and her brothers. Barbara wants to get a job to help buy groceries, but because she's only 16 and isn't attending school she doesn't have her working papers. No one will hire her for any legal work. She told me on the phone around the time she went AWOL that all she wanted was to help raise Rochelle's baby with her, to give that baby a happy life.

"Rochelle told me her brothers don't want me there no more," she tells me now. "And fuck her anyway."

I can tell by Barbara's leaden, lifeless eyes that she's had enough. She's tired of searching for places to stay, of fighting with Rochelle and her brothers. I'm afraid she'll have to resort to survival sex or drug-running in order to feed herself. I pull out a piece of paper and tell her to write down every person she knows. Maybe there's a family member who she hasn't thought about in a while, some distant relative. She holds the pen just above the surface of the paper, drawing circles in the air. She does this a while longer before dropping the pen to the desk.

"Ain't nobody," she says and rises up from the seat. I stand with her and lean against the doorway. I'm not ready for her to leave. I know that when she walks out of my office she'll have no place to go.

"I don't think we're done here," I say, but she's had enough and pushes past me, down the corridor, vanishing into the staircase. For the first time since meeting her I fear I'll never see Barbara again. ■

Ryan Berg's new book, *No House to Call My Home*, is available for purchase at *Magers & Quinn*, *Amazon*, and *Barnes & Noble*. For upcoming book readings and more information, go to www.nohousestocallmyhome.weebly.com.

For more information about the GLBT Host Home Program of Avenues for Homeless Youth, go to www.avenuesforyouth.org/programs-minneapolisosthome.html.

Rainbow Resources



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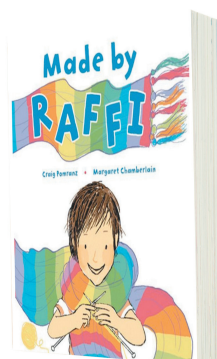
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This new release from Cedar Fort Publishing is a lively kid's book to teach children the importance of accepting everyone. This cute children's book is about a bunch of farm animals that need to learn to get along.

After a big clean up of the farm, the rooster and the hen want to have a party and invite everyone on the farm, the only problem is no one on the farm likes each other because everyone is so different: some are loud, some are messy, and some have funny hair. Edwin Rooster decides enough is enough and gathers everyone around to talk to them about how it doesn't matter what is wrong with everyone else. He tells them differences don't matter and that they can be friends with everyone, even if they don't all look the same. My favorite line from the book is:

"So if you hear film flam or gobbledygook, get rid of it quickly by hook or by crook! Don't let it botch friendships or ruin your day. Shoo it out! Hurry! It must go away!"

Melica Hudgens give us this adorable rhyming children's book that reminds us the little differences don't matter and we can be friends with everyone, even if we don't all look or sound the same. Containing fun words to read, this book has colorful illustrations. It's a perfect bedtime book to enjoy again and again.



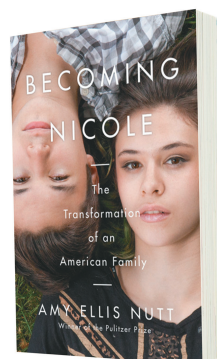
MADE BY RAFFI

\$18.99

Inspired by a true-life incident, *Made By Raffi* is the story of a little boy who likes to knit and sew — at first he is teased for his hobby, but in the end he becomes a hero to his class. The book is published in seven languages and distributed in ten countries so far by UK publishers Frances Lincoln under their diversity imprint, Janetta Otter-Barry Books. Award-winning artist Margaret Chamberlain is the illustrator.

Raffi is a shy boy who doesn't like noisy games and is often teased at school. But when he gets the idea of making a scarf for his dad's birthday he is full of enthusiasm, even though the other children think it is girly to knit. Then the day draws near for the school pageant, and there is one big problem: no costume for the prince. And that's when Raffi has his most brilliant idea of all: to make a prince's cape. On the day of the pageant, Raffi's cape is the star of the show.

"I wrote the book to support young boys and girls who are perceived as 'different' because of their appearance or hobbies," says Craig Pomranz, the book's author. "It is a funny colorful book with a serious message and will interest those who care about promoting diversity and embracing our differences, as well as all children seeking to fit in."



BECOMING NICOLE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY

\$27

Wayne and Kelly Maines adopted two twin boys, but soon after the parents noticed that Wyatt was different than Jonas. Wyatt, it turned out, was transgender and later transitioned to the woman that she is today — Nicole. The story of this family is being told in a book called *Becoming Nicole*.

Amy Ellis Nutt, a Pulitzer Prize winner, actually wrote the book thanks to access to "personal diaries, home videos, clinical journals, legal documents, medical records, and the Maineses themselves." It doesn't appear that Nutt holds back during this story but captures the true emotions of each person in the family. The book depicts the parent's reactions to seeing Jonas as a young boy enjoying playing with "sports and trucks and many of the things little boys were 'supposed' to like; but Wyatt [Nicole] liked princess dolls and dress-up and playing Little Mermaid." In fact, as a child, Nicole asked her parents when her penis would fall off.

The book details the parents' struggle. Though Kelly was more easily accepting of Nicole's transgender identity, Wayne, a Republican Air Force veteran, struggled to come to terms with his views about gender identity. Eventually he did and has become a voice for transgender rights. Nicole's parents legally changed Wyatt's name to Nicole before she entered fifth grade, but unfortunately it didn't prevent bullying that occurred in school.

Jonas, her twin brother, stood up for her many times against the harassers. The bullying became so bad that the family moved three hours away so that Nicole and Jonas could attend a middle school in a more liberal and large city in Maine where Nicole went "stealth," and told no one of her transgender identity in fear of her safety.

Becoming Nicole is a beautiful story of an all-American family that grew with love and acceptance as Nicole grew into herself. This book is for anyone "who's ever raised a child, felt at odds with society's conventions and norms, or had to embrace life when it plays out unexpectedly. It's a story of standing up for your beliefs and yourself — and it will inspire all of us to do the same."

612-400-SAFE

Youth living on the streets, in abusive homes, or in crisis situations in the Twin Cities can now to text someone for help. The Bridge for Youth in Minneapolis launched 612-400-SAFE in September. It is the first full-service crisis line in Minnesota.

Youth struggling with issues such as homelessness or sexual exploitation are able to text 612-400-SAFE. A trained volunteer or counselor will respond and offer access to support services.

The Bridge had to recruit at least 50 volunteers to staff the emergency response center. They are trained in how to respond to messages and offer emergency services, but Ali Kier, the youth response center supervisor, says their most important job will be to listen. "It's just someone to talk to," Kier said. "It's not always necessarily looking for shelter."

Bridge for Youth serves children age 10-17. It is the only program in the state that serves children that young. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. In 2014, 253 kids sought counseling services through the Bridge's walk-in program. Trained volunteers answered more than 3,400 calls to the 24/7 crisis hotline and 400-SAFE will improve access to services and counseling. ■

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Three Minnesota Titleholders Win In Indianapolis

Three Minnesota contestants won regional leather titles at the Great Lakes Leather Alliance (GLLA) weekend, Oct. 1–4 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Aurora Lee, the first-ever Ms Minnesota Leather Pride, was named Great Lakes Ms Leather Pride 2015. Ivan Nunez, the first-ever Mr. Minnesota Leather Sir, and boy Woody, the first-ever Minnesota Leatherboy, were named Great Lakes LeatherSIR 2016 and Great Lakes Leatherboy 2016, respectively.

All three titleholders previously had won their newly created Minnesota titles on April 4, during the inaugural Minnesota Leather Pride contest weekend at The Saloon. These three Minnesota leather titles are community-owned (through the Minnesota Leather Pride organization) and community-sponsored. So the entire community can take pride in the fact that all three of the first holders of these titles went on to win their next level of competition.

For Aurora Lee, Nunez, and boy Woody, winning their Minnesota titles meant their next competitive event would be representing Minnesota at the fourteenth annual GLLA weekend in Indianapolis. This year's jam-packed four-day weekend included a total of five regional leather title contests along with a wide variety of other educational and social events.

The five contests that were part of the GLLA weekend were Great LakesSIR/boy; Great Lakes Ms Leather Pride; Great Lakes Master/slave; Great Lakes Bootblack; and, new this year, Great Lakes Pup & Trainer. This year's contests attracted 26 contestants, who represented seven states in the Great Lakes area.

In addition to the three Great Lakes title winners from Minnesota, the Great Lakes Master/slave 2015 title was awarded to Master John and slave amendah, from Illinois; the Great Lakes Bootblack 2015 title was awarded to Bootblack Meghan, from Kentucky; and the Great Lakes Puppy 2016 and Great Lakes Trainer 2016 titles were awarded to Pup Rocco and Daddy John, both from Illinois.



Aurora Lee, Great Lakes Ms Leather Pride 2015; boy Woody, Great Lakes Leatherboy 2016; and Ivan Nunez, Great Lakes LeatherSIR 2016. Photo by Indy Johnson

Besides the five leather contests, this year's GLLA weekend included over 25 workshops on topics such as "Pup Play 101," "Flagging: Lost Art of the Cruise," "Leadership Theories and Styles," "Hypnosis," and "No Expiration Date: Long Term Master/slave Relationships."

The weekend also included a vendor fair, a silent auction, a puppy mosh pit, and a Bootblack Ice Cream Social. Women's, men's, and pansexual playspaces were available Friday and Saturday evenings.

Here are just two examples of the many other special events and activities offered throughout the weekend. On Thursday evening, filmmaker Christina Court offered a screening of her new documentary, *High Shine: 15 Years of International Ms Bootblack*. This was followed on Saturday afternoon by a Fireside Chat, which

was a live on-stage interview with Daddy Gregg Lakota, who has been active in the leather community for 27 years. (The interview was filmed and will be added to the Fireside Chat collection at the Leather Archives & Museum in Chicago.)

According to GLLA Executive Director Ms Kendra, over 500 people attended this year's GLLA weekend. About 20 of those attendees traveled from Minnesota to support and cheer on the Minnesota contestants. Among them were Ren Rushold (Mr. Minneapolis Eagle 2015) and Stephen Patton (Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2015), both of whom assisted Aurora Lee in her fantasy presentation.

Also making the trek from the Twin Cities to Indianapolis were Justin Anderson, who assisted Nunez and boy Woody; Bud Ingram-Lile, one of the producers of the Minnesota Leather Pride weekend contests; and Vicki, who was a judge for this year's Great Lakes Master/slave contest.

Aurora Lee, Nunez, and boy Woody are not the first Great Lakes title winners from Minnesota. Both Riches, who won the Great Lakes Ms Leather Pride title last year, and Tim Hotchkin, who won the Great Lakes Leatherboy title last year (and who is the current International Leatherboy titleholder), traveled from the Twin Cities to GLLA and ended their title years by offering their step-aside speeches. Also traveling from Minnesota to Indianapolis this year was Bootblack Kai, who was Great Lakes Bootblack two years ago and who was a judge for this year's Great Lakes Bootblack contest.

Having won their regional titles, Nunez and boy Woody will go on to compete in the International LeatherSIR/boy contest, to be held September 2016 in Dallas. Aurora Lee has several options for her next competition, and at this writing she is still considering which option to pursue. ■

For more information about the Great Lakes Leather Alliance weekend in Indianapolis, including details about next year's weekend, visit www.greatlakesleather.org.

OUR AFFAIRS

BOOKS | BY E.B. BOATNER

Already Doing It: Intellectual Disability and Sexual Agency

Michael Gill
University of Minnesota Press
\$26

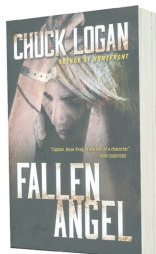
The basic question author Gill poses: Should sexual citizenship depend on IQ? An important statement to consider Gill addresses in the subtitle, where he states unequivocally that intellectually disabled individuals are "already doing it." The book unfolds the history of powers in the United States limiting the sexuality of those they deem unfit, particularly the ongoing stereotypes that intellectually disabled women are highly sexual — and fertile — and such men are oversexed and predatory. Gill further posits that able-bodied authority is linked to paternalism and "upholding the primacy of sexual ableism." Provocative and thought provoking, the text, through specific examples, urges the reader to examine actual individuals and their varied sexual expression in a new light. A successful argument for rights of the intellectually disabled.



Fallen Angel

Chuck Logan
Conquill Press
\$15

Captain Jesse Kraig, Iraq Black Hawk pilot in the flight company of the North Dakota National Guard's 4/143rd Helicopter Assault Battalion, out on a ho-hum mission about to intersect with a covert action involving one Morgon Jump. Unplanned, Kraig's bird is down and her crew dead. But not in the crash, and with all evidence of murder wiped clean. Kraig, buried under wreckage and bits of her copilot, survived. And she saw something. Someone who...what? To keep her from remembering, she's drugged, airlifted out, to remain a vegetable. But the man who pulled her out won't rest until she begins to remember — and they're both slated to disappear. A taut thriller, with Logan's superb words flowing through a delta of dark staccato bursts and seamless elegiac prose.



The Last Kings of Sark

Rosa Rankin-Gee
St. Martin's Griffin
\$18.50

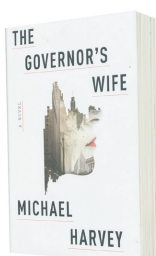
Jude is a young 21-year-old when she arrives on the tiny Channel Island of Sark — Europe's last bastion of feudalism — to assume the summer tutoring of the teenaged son of a wealthy family. Pip's gruff, absent father had thought from her name that he was hiring a young man; his wife, Esmé, remains a shadowy wraith ensconced in her room. Lonely Jude is drawn to the raffish Sofi, a Polish kitchen girl with whom she must share lodgings. Soon the three young people have formed a powerful trio. But all idylls end. Rankin-Gee, for the remainder of the novel, follows the three in their disparate lives, through a voice and language that is lyrical and evocative. Their story lingers long after you've closed the book.



The Governor's Wife

Michael Harvey
Knopf
\$24.95

In this latest of his Chicago-based series, private investigator Michael Kelly receives an anonymous letter hiring him to find a missing person, and noting a hundred grand is in an account for him. The missing person? Ex-governor Ray Perry, who vanished into thin air two years ago during a short elevator ride from the courtroom (where he had just been sentenced to 37 years in prison) to the basement. The key to it, Kelly assumes, is Perry's wife Marie, who staunchly denies all. Digging, pulling, picking at threads, Kelly unravels a labyrinth of political and family corruption that spells death for some, perhaps Kelly himself. Just when you think you've figured it out, you find you haven't. Let yourself be pulled into Harvey's web. Enjoy. ■



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PORSCHE

2015 Kia Optima



After 20 years of selling cars in North America, Kia has hit its stride. They have a lineup of automobiles, crossovers, and minivans that people are considering heavily against some more popular choices. In fact, you are a part of Kia's success. Look how many Kia Souls you bought! That is the kind of vehicle we like: small, different, and very practical.

The Soul, along with the Sportage and Sorento to name a few, would not be possible without its most mainstream product. This particular sedan shook a lot of people's perception of what a mid-sized family sedan should look and feel like, not to mention how such a sedan should drive. The result is one good-looking sedan, one that has been with us for five years now.

It was already announced that its replacement is coming soon. I figured it was a good time to get in a drive of the stunning third generation Kia Optima before the new one arrives. To say "goodbye" to the fantastic Optima, we received a 2015 SX Limited model to do the honors.

With every new or thoroughly revised entry into the high-volume family sedan segment introduced since its arrival in late 2010, we wondered if the Optima can hold its own with the rest of the crowd.

It is actually one of Peter Schreyer's masterpieces when he was head of design for Kia. He took a mid-sized sedan and gave it some very compelling lines. The Optima's greenhouse has two wide door glass areas, giving the C-pillar a distinct design that emulates the profiles of muscle cars of decades past. The chrome frame of the roofline is a paean to the current Jaguar XJ — or, so it appears at some angles. The rear end may appear somewhat Audi-like...more recent models, in fact. Overall, the Optima's exterior pushed the envelope of design in its price class, and that's a good thing! It could also be a blessing or a curse, depending on your taste in automobile.

It wasn't the only thing that piqued our interest in the Optima. The

cabin was just as stunning as the body. The instrument panel wrapped around you with touch points that are easy to feel and nice to work with. Switchgear, from the steering wheel all the way to the right on the audio and HVAC systems, just felt right. We were entertained by an awesome instrument cluster that delights my eyes and keeps me informed of everything we do.

The center stack is crowned with a huge screen for the infotainment system and Kia's excellent navigation system. Included with this system are HD Radio, SiriusXM satellite radio, and Bluetooth connectivity for the phone- and music-files and additional connectivity with the UVO smartphone app. Sound comes from a wonderful eight-speaker Infinity sound system.

You sit nicely in seats that are not only comfortable, but also supportive. SX Limited models feature a "quilted" pattern upholstered in perforated leather, which is very entertaining and bespoke. Rear room is extraordinary for the legs. We need to caution tall passengers to watch their head of the coupe-like rear glass. Tall drivers also need to watch out for the panoramic moonroof which cuts into headroom up front as well. Instead of driving a mid-sized family sedan, we felt like we were driving a sports car instead. Even competitive Audis (the A4), Saabs (a pre-owned 9-3), and Jaguars (it is a stretch, but the XF comes to mind) had more headroom for us to work with.

Choosing the SX Limited will get you a very special engine. The 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder mill is perhaps one of the quietest high performance engines in its class. With 274 horsepower on tap, there is minimal turbo lag offering up smooth power up front. A six-speed automatic transmission will send that smooth turbocharged power down to the front wheels without any hesitation.

Ride quality was pretty good when road surfaces are smooth. If it gets bumpy, you can certainly feel each imperfection as you go along. Handling was near flat in the corners and offered minimal roll through the banks. Braking is not bad all around in regular and panic stops. They have somewhat of a soft feel at even moderate stops. Still, the Optima offered a steering set that reacted sharply and induced a tight turning circle. Though it felt somewhat soft, there was minimal-to-no play at center. Drive modes were available to enhance transmission gearing and steering feel, where Sport tightens up those components for improved feel.

In terms of fuel economy, the penalty for having the turbo is having an unwelcome number to go along with it. We averaged 22.0 MPG in the Optima, something that was somewhat expected however.

The outgoing 2015 Kia Optima has a starting price of \$21,840 for

an LX sedan. The top-of-the-line SX Limited tester came with a sticker price of \$36,325.

By the time this review comes out, the 2016 Optima would have arrived at your nearby Kia dealer; however, that does not discount considering the outgoing generation at all. It means better deals for what is really a fine mid-sized sedan that broke ground for Kia and set the company on course toward creating fantastic automobiles worth talking about. The Optima simply raised the bar on product quality, engineering, design, and execution. That alone makes the Optima very desirable.

Yet, it is a very crowded field. The products are indeed getting better, including the Kia Optima. Even if you aren't looking at this 2015 model or the incoming 2016, one would not fault you for buying something as fine as this car. A fitting salute to a ground-breaking automobile. ■



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The Trifecta

Are you ready for more soul bearing?
If not, flip the page. I won't be offended.

Lately, I've been thinking of personal demons. All of us have them; they're a part of the human condition. Sometimes we conquer our demons; other times, they conquer us.

My demons are triplets, what I call The Trifecta.

Demon 1: A fear of being the real me.

I beat this demon when I transitioned from male to female at the not-so-young age of 52.

Why did it take so long to get here?

It's simple: like many "gender correctors" (people who transition later in life), I feared that all hell would break loose if I ever admitted to myself (and then, to the world) that the "true" gender in my brain didn't match the physical gender of my body.

Those familiar with me know that yes, all hell did break loose as I transitioned genders: divorce, a lost job and big career change, people who refused to accept me, and savings down the drain.

And yet, I survived. Actually, it's been way more than that. In reality, I've thrived as Ellen "Ellie" Krug. Twenty years ago, it was impossible to imagine the peace of mind that I have now.

Score one for me.

I've also taken on Demon 2, the fear of being alone, what I call my "Alone Monster."

This demon has its roots in my alcoholic father who used to go missing. Often it was for several hours; other times, he'd be gone overnight without a word. Years of therapy revealed that this fed into my grave fear of being alone and unloved, something which later morphed into a fear of dying alone — I just couldn't bear the thought of being on my deathbed without a lover to hold my hand. Throw in that I suspected I'd be very single post-gender transition (I sure called that one right!), and the Alone Monster had me near-paralyzed.

All of that therapy eventually paid off; ever so gradually, I realized that authenticity and living in the moment are what I value. Most of the time (with "most" being the operative phrase here), I'm okay with not having a lover and with the thought that I'll likely go out of this world alone.

Take that Alone Monster! No longer do you totally control me.

Lastly, there's Demon 3, a tall blonde with a deep voice and a bottle of Chateau St. Michelle chardonnay at her side. This demon, dear gentle readers, springs from my fear of being sober.

She absolutely loves booze — mid-quality chardonnay and Heineken in particular — and is quite social to boot; she's befriended bartenders and liquor store owners near and far. Indeed, I've been told that without this demon at my side, Ellie Krug is "no fun."

For a long time, I believed just that.

Even worse, this demon propped up my other demons. Alcohol, I thought, was the magical elixir that compensated for keeping the real person inside me — a woman — closeted. And, too, a good tall glass of chardonnay always seemed to alleviate the pain of loneliness; an alcohol-fueled buzz made all of the other crap livable. There was no way I'd be able to handle things sober.

At least that's what I told myself. For decades.

Much to my utter surprise, drinking actually makes it way more difficult to deal with everything else in my life. Inevitably, with a few chardonnays in me, I'll say or do something that spawns next day regrets. Throw in that booze really screws up my sleeping (I'm talking middle-of-the night insomnia after the alcohol in my system burns off), and rather than help, drinking exacerbates all of the other issues I hoped to salve.

As it turns out, I had everything backwards. In fact, getting rid of Demon 1 and keeping Demon 2 at bay paved the way for dealing with Demon 3.

However, I'm not entirely there just yet. As I write these words, I'm closing in on only 100 days of sobriety — my latest sobriety stint in a series of stints. I feel really good about this attempt, so I'm optimistic that it will stick.

All I know is that for today, I've put Demon 3 on hold. Hopefully, I'll be able to say the same thing tomorrow, but I won't know for sure until tomorrow arrives.

Thus you have it, The Trifecta, more oversharing by yours truly.

As I often tell others, I'm simply a survivor, just like everyone else. What I've survived is the fragility of the human me. I'm not precisely sure how I've accomplished that and certainly it's been pretty messy, even ugly.

Still, the payoffs have been immense: authenticity, clarity, and gratitude.

Plus maybe a healthy liver. Or at least one that's not as pickled as it could be. Thanks for listening. ■

Ellen (Ellie) Krug is the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change (2013) and the architect of The C Project, a new rural Midwest diversity/inclusion initiative (www.elliekrug.com/the-c-project). She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.*



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Night Owl

Last night, my girlfriend and I started to take the famous “36 Questions that Lead to Love” quiz. According to the psychologist who created it, if you go through this exercise with a complete stranger, you’ll fall in love by the end of the quiz.

My girlfriend is a psychotherapist, so I thought she’d be really interested in taking the quiz.

“It’s psychology!” I exclaimed. Like a dog that drags a dead thing to her owner as a gift, I’m constantly dropping pop psychology carcasses at her feet to show I care.

“It’s nonsense,” she responded. “Besides, we already are in love.”

“But this will make us more in love!” I said, so we agreed to answer questions during commercial breaks for *The Voice*.

Because we’re already so stupidly in love, the first questions weren’t very challenging. But then we hit question eight: “Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.” I merrily claimed that we have everything — everything! — in common. We each want at least one pet goat, share an ambivalence for seafood, and have a weird affection for 1970 boy bands. We’re perfect for each other!

“Well, there’s one big difference,” she said, nodding her head in the direction of the clock. We stared at the hour darkly. It was 9 p.m. My bedtime.

Our only significant difference can be summed up neatly: I’m a morning person, and she is not. I’m generally up by 5 a.m. And by up, I mean “up!” Early morning is when I’m most energized and productive. Each morning, I’m filled with unbridled glee at the opportunity to get a jump-start on the day.

Sadly, as I burst out of sleep each morning, the beautiful lump hibernating next to me in a cave of blankets and pillows does not share my

enthusiasm. At the risk of being undiplomatic, let’s just say she can be a bit cranky in the morning.

On weekdays, I generally try to leave the house before she gets up to avoid annoying her with my irrepressible joie de vivre. Although she is of French ancestry, this is not a character trait she values before 10 a.m. We recently took a quiz to find our spirit animals. Hers is a bear, something that is quite obvious when I try to rouse her before she’s ready to wake. It usually results in me getting growled and swatted at.

Our moods reverse in the evening hours. I get cranky as the moon rises, and she feeds off the night like a vampire.

In the opening weeks of our relationship, when we were so drunk with love, I vowed to stay up late with her, and she tried to get up early with me. Sleep was our enemy because it robbed us of precious moments with each other — something we were so hungry for after spending 25 years apart. But after a few months of no sleep, we were exhausted to the point of hallucinating.

One day, after I thought I saw an elf-like figure dance a jig across the conference room table during an important meeting, I returned home and suggested: “I think we can cram enough precious moments in between the hours of 10 a.m. and 9 p.m., don’t you?” She agreed. So we fell back into our old sleep routines.

Last night, as my bewitching hour of 9 p.m. drew near, I struggled to keep my eyes open as we moved on to the next love quiz question.

“Let’s finish the quiz when we’re both fully awake,” she suggested. We both knew that our individual sleep orbits would never intersect in a way to allow that to happen. But I was too tired to argue, and too in love to feel the need to complete the quiz. ■

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Cutter

My room doesn't have the effects of boys' rooms my age. There are no posters of pretty girls, no baseball gloves or trophies, no dirty clothes strewn out on the floor. Although, I do have a Nintendo 64 with three games and a broken controller, so I'm not completely devoid of adolescent masculinity.

I live in the loft above the garage, in what my brother and his wife (who, after my mother died, offered to raise me) once called "the queer's suite." I have an oak bedroom set from Sears and a skylight that's never shown me the moon.

Nothing here is really *mine*, of course, so my sister-in-law enjoys telling me. All of my belongings were with me when my mother passed away. All purchases thereafter are property of my sister-in-law and her husband — whose blood I share but affections I cannot, no matter how desperately I try.

There are no pictures of me inside the house, no starred schoolwork on the refrigerator, no pats on the back or smiles in my direction. I've been told "I love you" only once living in this house, during my grandmother's only visit.

The closest thing I have to a friend is Christina, a curvy schoolmate who eats lunch with me in a vacant classroom. I'm a "fag" to everyone else, as much as I am at home.

I lie to my family about having friends. On Saturdays, I tell my brother and sister-in-law that I'm hanging out with Luke, a boy from school who once asked for my opinion on his shoes and never spoke to me again. I leave the house on Saturday mornings and bike around

the neighborhood by myself until dinner, when I return to regale my niece and nephew with stories of Luke and Justin's wonderful adventures. They listen to me wide-eyed and glowing, and plead with me to introduce them to Luke. "Justin has no friends," my brother reminds them.

It was on such a Saturday that I fell off my bicycle returning home. I came to a stop too quickly and lost my balance, sending my palms and knees into the street. As I watched the asphalt tear through my skin, I was curiously absent the impulse to brace for pain. When the resulting fiery sting shot through body, I imagined the pavement was scrubbing me, cleaning me of my troubles, taking my mind off of my family. The pain was an escape.

I didn't stand up immediately after I fell. I didn't cry. I didn't move. I rested my cheek on the ground and savored it. I felt every rock and every grain of dirt under my face and I thought how wonderful it'd be if every day would be like today.

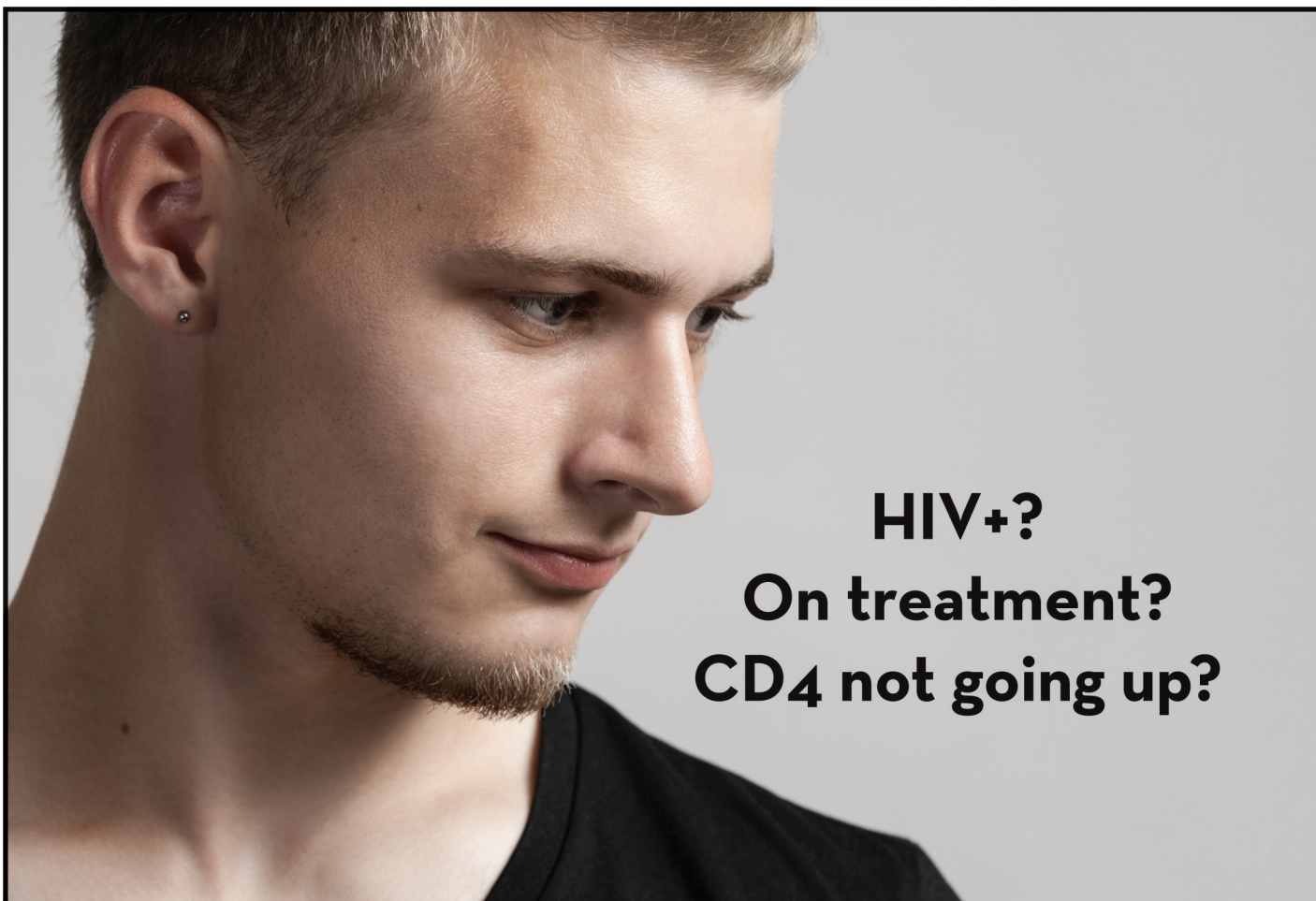
Now I'm in my room, under my skylight, looking for the moon. I have a small pocket-knife open in my right hand, pushing downward on my left wrist. I squeeze my eyes shut, bite my bottom lip, and cut into my arm. I cut, and cut, and cut. This isn't me trying to kill myself, this is my best attempt at replicating that feeling of lying on the street after falling off my bike, in pain so spectacular that no amount of trying would get me to think about anything else. In this moment I am not a fag, I don't care that I have no friends, or that I feel like a stranger at home. In this moment there

is nothing but relief.

This activity becomes routine (once or twice a month, when I feel I'm bursting at the seams), but no one notices until several weeks in, when my brother asks about the cuts on my wrists. I never thought far enough ahead to prepare an explanation should anyone discover my marks, but I didn't assume anyone would care. I brush off the question, telling my brother that our dog must've done it. Despite my scars being densely concentrated in one place, my brother accepts my excuse and moves to a different subject. I know he knows I'm lying, but I'm grateful he isn't concerned. Intervention would mean the loss of the only thing that gives me peace.

I cut myself for almost a year, with increasing frequency, until the following summer, when I left home to spend vacation with my aunt in Fort Lauderdale. There I turned 14 and discovered what it was to write, what it was to cut with a pen instead of blade, and I found that the blood on the page was far more agonizing and effective than it was on my skin. Unlike cutting, however, writing was more than a desperate treatment to depression; it was a friend I wouldn't lose, who'd hear me out when I needed it the most, who'd respond without saying a word.

To cutters: your situation may seem inescapable, but you've got an entire army on standby — people who will listen and who *want* to listen. HopeLine.com is a great place to start, and you're always welcome to reach out to me. ThroughTheseEyes.JustinJones@gmail.com. ■



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